

Data storage principles

Anything you collect through the process of your research, relating to participants, audiences or partners, can be thought of as data. This might include data from surveys, interview audio and/or transcripts, or your own fieldnotes. We sometimes refer to these as *materials*, as data can sometimes be interpreted as meaning quantitative.

With regards to data storage, as of May 2018, the **EU General Data Protection Regulation** came into effect and now legally limits what data can be collected, how it is used, and for how long. Visit [this link](#) for comprehensive instruction, but some of the key principles taken from this documentation are that:

You must store data for the shortest time possible.

You must collect and process only the personal data that is necessary to fulfil that purpose.



Your company/organisation should establish time limits to erase or review the data stored.

Certain information should be given to individuals whose data is collected.

In practice, you will need to consider where you are storing data and how. If participants request anonymity, and you store interview transcripts with their names on a shared, online cloud storage system (e.g. Dropbox or Google Drive), how secure is this? If the transcripts must be shared, consider using a participant number or pseudonym, and keep any spreadsheet of corresponding real names or demographic data offline (on your computer or printed documents).

Once the evaluation is complete, inform the client that you must and will delete the data you either created (through interviews) or accessed (audience figures passed on from the client, for example). This may also helpfully prompt your client into realising that if they have no further use for their project data, they may be required to delete their copies too.

The last of the points listed above is open to some interpretation. Strictly speaking, data should be collected in order to answer your evaluation research questions. So, unless your question needs to directly address whether a younger audience was drawn to a series of public events, asking their age before the interview, or in a survey, might be seen as unnecessary and intrusive. However, in reviewing data at an analysis stage, demographic data like this can be useful in interpreting results and understanding patterns. If one person answers a question very differently to other participants and a quick scan of ages shows they are 30 years older than most interviewees, might that explain their response?

Finally, put yourself in the shoes of your participants. Beyond legal obligations as set out in GDPR, how will they feel about being asked for lots of personal information? Is it likely to put people off participating? In which case, would you rather have a few respondents, happy to give you a lot of their information, or a larger cohort with a lighter touch? You can get a sense of how people will respond to your demands by piloting your approach with colleagues, so that you strike the right balance for your evaluation.



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